



Community Health Improvement Process

**2014-2015 Community Health Needs Assessment
Community Conversation at the East County Regional Center
June 25, 2015**

Introduction

Healthy Montgomery hosted a community conversation on health and well-being at the Eastern Montgomery County Regional Service Center on Wednesday, June 24, 2015. The conversation was hosted in collaboration with the East County Citizens Advisory Board's Quality of Life/Social Issues Committee and took place from 7:00 to 9:00 pm in Silver Spring, MD. There were 16 participants. The conversation was facilitated by Cathie Sheffield-Thompson.

The community conversation included a discussion of what is meant by health and well-being at the individual and community levels, elements of a healthy community, community assets and challenges in Montgomery County, and practical steps to improve the health and well-being of the community. Participants engaged in both large and small group discussion, and were also offered the opportunity to contribute comments and feedback regarding the meeting in writing.

Defining Health and Well-Being

As a conversation starter, participants shared what helps them be in a state of health and well-being. Family time, meditation, dancing, walking, fishing, gardening, eating healthy foods, learning by taking courses, and taking naps were some of the responses to defining a healthy state. Participants also listed the following resources that help them maintain their health and well-being: parks and bike trails, recreation centers and local gyms, libraries, workshops, festivals (Hometown Holiday, Strawberry), websites, service centers, and colleges and university courses.

Assets that Support Health and Well-Being

Community participants identified resources in the community (eastern region of Montgomery County) that enabled them to thrive in their healthiest state of wellness.

East County provides assets that support healthy communities to live in.

- New schools (Paint Branch High School), good neighbors, churches/religious organizations and libraries (White Oak, Germantown)
- A larger and more diverse population
- Public transportation
- Non-profit farmers markets
- Bike lanes for safety
- Recycling services and bulk item removal
- Workforce development and jobs
- New red light cameras resulting in fewer accidents



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- An increased and visible local police presence as a result of the new district police headquarters in White Oak
- Inter-County Connector highway (ICC)
- Improved pedestrian access on New Hampshire Ave when FDA moved into White Oak
- Seventh Day Adventist Outpatient Cancer Center to be opening soon
- Grocery stores offering vaccines

East County also provides quality community centers, recreational parks, and programs that support health and wellness.

- Senior programs such as Silver Slippers
- Senior Centers in community recreation centers such as White Oak
- Parks and trails such as Fairland Park, Gunners Park, Sligo Creek Park, Hillandale Park (tennis courts)
- County pools (MLK pool) and recreation centers (White Oak, Praisner Center)
- Schools/afterschool programs
- WIC/SNAP programs
- Clinics
- Resurgence of the immigrant population has called for increased awareness about the number and quality of community health centers

Barriers to Health and Well-Being

Participants discussed challenges in their community (eastern region of Montgomery County) that make living healthy more difficult.

East County is challenged by transportation and safety concerns identified as:

- Not enough reliable, quality public transportation options to and within the east part of Montgomery County
- Walkability is a safety issue as there are many major roads to cross, with limited pedestrian walkways
- East County has a high concentration of high occupancy/low income housing that divides the east and west side of Montgomery County. More attention is needed on the east side for crime prevention. Multiple crimes have been reported at Bank of America on Rte. 29 at night
- Longer commutes and lots of traffic congestion result in limitations on time for healthy recreational activities
- ICC toll road negatively impacts the financial well being of East County residents.
- Increase in crime and staffing of the police force
- Need better lighting and emergency call boxes in local parks
- Inconsistent bike lanes on many roads
- Post office moved to accident prone location

East County also has challenges to employment, housing, and health resources for a growing, diverse population identified below:

- Little economic development and not many higher paying jobs make it difficult to work where you live



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- Limited restaurants, arts and entertainment venues results in more travel outside of the community
- Few farmer's markets limits access to healthy food choices while having an abundance of fast food restaurants
- More healthcare clinics needed
- Address the health care needs of our diverse population
- Lyme disease as a result of over population of deer
- Affordable housing is getting more expensive

East County community center programs and service are impacted by the following challenges:

- Disparity in classes offered at the community centers in comparison to offerings of the west side of the county.
- Lack of diverse community center classes (Tai Chi, meditation)
- Difficult process to begin or teach classes at community centers
- No promotion of basic skills/education programs such as job skill training, English language, etc.
- Poor marketing of county services and programs (like parks and recreation)
- Services not growing at the rate of population. For example, the community had only one new recreation center in 10 years
- Better information/education resources and support for the urban behaviors of wild animal such as deer and raccoons
- Change in state policy on reimbursement for services has resulted in reduced funding to organizations like the CHI center, which supports our residents with developmental disabilities

Practical Steps to Improve Health and Well-Being

Participants made the following recommendations to improve health and well-being of East County. The list below is ordered by the priority voting given to each item.

1. Create a decision making body to increase transparency and accountability for community resources, implementation, communication, and evaluation of programs. (9 priority votes)
2. Market East County for new business and job creation to aid in living where you work. (9 priority votes)
3. Add staff, resources, funding, communication, repurposing of resources to create effective and useful community centers in East County. (8 priority votes)
4. Reduce deer population to reduce Lyme disease. (6 priority votes)
5. Provide more infrastructure funding of East County to make the community more appealing, (not centered on Rte. 29), to reduce traffic congestion, lack of access to other place. (5 priority votes)
6. Build community health centers that offer free/low cost quality care. (5 priority votes)
7. Follow other successful models, like Arlington City, to provide more transit-oriented design. Complete the purple metro line. (4 priority votes)
8. Build sidewalks to improve biking safety for children – funding through capital improvement program. (3 priority votes)
9. Add indoor sports facilities to parks. (3 priority votes)
10. Revise state/county reimbursement rates for aid services to our developmental disabled residents. (2 priority votes)



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11. Provide better public transportation for those who need it most at the best accessible rate by realigning routes and frequency of buses based on the needs of the residents. (2 priority votes)
12. Increase representation to gain more advocacy for East County at the county and state level. (2 priority votes)
13. Focus on business mentality (marketing and promotion) to run programs more efficiently. (1 priority vote)
14. Make more programs available based on different age groups.
15. Fix Burtonsville Crossing Center – fill vacant buildings where Giant and other retailers moved across the road.

Community Conversation Feedback

Participants were provided an opportunity to give written feedback about the meeting. In a short closeout survey, participants were asked, “Is there anything else that you want us to know, including what you like or did not like about this community conversation?” Two participants responded to this question and their comments are provided below.

We had sufficient time (due to well designed small group dialogue) to cover as much as we could think of. No negatives from this session.

Also looking at improving dental care to low income families as well as giving free care in prenatal packages and the first 6 months of newborns life for mothers.